

16. *The Scrofulous Constitution—the signs by which it is known—the causes in which it originates—its effects upon families and individuals.* By DR. KING.—The *scrofulous constitution* may be called a defective and abnormal one, consisting in an imperfect state of the vital powers; “the principle of vitality” (whatever that is) causing an imperfect development of the physical structure, both in form and substance. There is an imperfect deposit of bony matter to form the skeleton, and too great a proportion of animal matter. The bones are therefore too soft to hold their contents, when that is required, as in the head; and too soft to support weight and endure force, when that is their office, as in the rest of the body, the spine, ribs, pelvis, and extremities. All the cartilaginous parts are increased in size: the extremities of the long bones are large and soft, and the interstices filled with serum and jelly instead of earthy matter: and the bones are either longer or shorter than the average.

The head bones being soft, give way to the pressure of the brain, which is affected more by the influence of gravity than its own vitality, and becomes misshapen. When fluid collects within, the shape is still more affected, and in those who recover, the disfigurement remains for life.

The malar bones are often too prominent, and the lower jaw too large: the palate is often imperfect, and the dentition is tardy, difficult, and irritating: the teeth imperfectly formed, discoloured, friable, only one half enamelled, and readily decay: the two middle upper incisors are often unnaturally large and prominent; the upper lip partakes of the imperfection of the palate, and is often fissured. Frequently the ears are deficient, the cochlea being wanting, and sometimes the internal meatus: the thorax is deficient in size, and deformed in shape: the ribs bent in, the sternum protruding, and its divisions imperfectly united. The abdomen is too large and protuberant, from the flabbiness of internal parts and abnormal size of organs and mesenterical enlargement. The bones of the spine, partaking of the deficiency of earthy matter, particularly of the phosphates, are too soft to support the head and chest, and yield as well as their ligaments. The sacrum is often pushed towards the pubes, producing a narrow pelvis, and consequently in females, difficult or impossible parturition: the ilia are often twisted: the arms too long or too short for the body, the wrists too swollen, and the hands misshapen. The lower extremities are too long or too short, badly supporting the trunk: the knees larger, the bones badly fitted to each other, forming the knock-knee, or the reverse; the tibia, sometimes the femur, bending beneath its weight, and the feet splay-footed, or club-footed, in various degrees.

The soft parts partake of the same want of vitality. The brain is too large or too small, too soft, pulpy, and heavy in its functions, and liable to effusion from vascular debility: though sometimes its intellectual functions are more active than common, this being the exception, not the rule. The nerves are not so defective in carrying sensations or motions, as the brain is in its functions. The vascular system is generally relaxed and weak, and what used to be called (for want of a better theory) *leucophlegmatic*: the muscular fibre is weak and relaxed, and wanting in tone and vigour; the hair is generally of a light colour or reddish, and thin in texture, and scanty, and liable to fall off, independent of disease, from a low vitality: the eye has a peculiar expression, generally heavy, languid, inexpressive; whilst sometimes it has an animated expression of a peculiar kind, known to medical men, and may be called the *scrofulous eye*; at others, it foretells consumption, of itself. As a contrast to other signs of imperfection, the eyelashes are often long and beautiful. The stature varies from the dwarf to the apparent giant, when a boy may be six feet high at fifteen years of age; but such excess in height is never accompanied with corresponding muscular strength and well-developed limbs and features; they are always puerile and almost effeminate. The appearance of the child is often that of the little old man: while the appearance of the man is often that of youth and boyhood without its vigour. Sometimes the child is fresh and plump, with *embonpoint*, and to the artist beautiful; but this hypertrophy of the cellular membrane is delusive and morbid, and often accompanied with organic infirmities, foretelling future disease.

The deposit of tuberculous matter, from imperfect assimilation, is one of the

most obvious and leading effects of the scrofulous constitution, to which some writers have improperly confined their notion of scrofula. It is only one effect or disease among many which arises from a common constitution. Scrofula not only produces specific diseases, but modifies all which happen in the body in which it exists. Thus, hooping-cough, small-pox, measles, scarlet fever may be fatal in a scrofulous constitution, and harmless in an unscrofulous one.

The specific diseases to which the scrofulous diathesis gives rise, are hydrocephalus, tumours of the brain, tubercle, abscess, fungus, epilepsy, insanity, hysteria, amaurosis, cataract, deafness, otorrhœa, conjunctivitis, lippitudo, lupus, ozæna, coryza; tubercular glands in the neck; diseases of the heart and lungs, of the abdomen, œsophagus, stomach, bowels, pancreas, liver, kidneys, bladder, uterus, mesentery, scalp, skin, joints. Many forms of indigestion, dyspepsia, mal-assimilation, anorexia, general debility, want of tone and power, nervous debility without organic disease, are modifications of the scrofulous diathesis: so is gout.

Scrofula is supposed to affect one-fifth of mankind: of those who are born scrofulous, one-half perish in infancy; of scrofulous fetuses, one-quarter die in utero. Few scrofulous persons live to be married; this seems to be the provision of nature to get rid of the imperfect part of her works. Louis calls phthisis the most relentless enemy of the human race; but he forgets that it is the means of preserving purity of blood and vigour of constitution. Nature does not allow the direct transmission of scrofula to proceed, as a general rule, beyond three or four generations. It is then cut short by phthisis, or some other organic form of scrofula, or by abortion, or by non-conception. The following principles may be laid down as true and fundamental in scrofula, the cases on which they are founded being omitted for brevity; but probably every medical man's experience will assent to their truth:—

1. The grand source of the scrofulous constitution is the direct hereditary principle.

2. Scrofula is hereditary in collateral branches, when latent in the direct line.

3. When second marriages take place, if both parents are healthy, the children will be healthy; if either parent be scrofulous, the children will be scrofulous.

4. Persons who may have been scrofulous in youth may appear to have been cured, and to have grown into good health, but the constitutional taint remains, and the children will be scrofulous.

5. Phthisis is the most fatal form of the scrofulous constitution. Sydenham called it "scrofula of the lungs." Portal considered that congenital phthisis was scrofulous. Bayle and Laennec the same. All cachexia is a form of scrofula.

6. Scrofula and phthisis co-exist in the same family. More than half the scrofulous patients have parents or ancestors who died of phthisis. Of eighty-four cases of scrofula in the hospital of St. Louis, at Paris, more than half had phthisical parents: all the patients in that hospital who died of various forms of scrofula, had tubercles in the lungs.

7. Persons who are scrofulous in childhood sometimes become stronger after puberty; but the taint remains, and the children are scrofulous. The parents try to conceal the scrofula of their youth, which makes it difficult for the physician to trace the constitution of the child, unless he is clear in his general principles.

8. Parents who do not appear to be scrofulous themselves, but whose brothers or sisters are so, have scrofulous children. The family taint passes through them to the children. Thus, scrofula, like gout, is said sometimes to skip a generation.

The scrofulous constitution may be originated independent of hereditary taint.

1. Syphilis is a cause of scrofula. Astruc says, when scrofula is not hereditary, it is invariably caused by syphilis. Scrofula attacked the nurse children (foundlings) of Montmorency, in France; all the nurses had syphilis; as they

were cured, the children got well. Another originating cause of scrofula is excessive indulgence and abuse of the sexual instinct. The children of such parents are generally scrofulous. The parent verifies the expression in Job xx. 2, 11: "His bones are full of the sin of his youth." This power of early self-indulgence is one of the curses of hereditary wealth.

3. Another originating cause of scrofula is *premature* indulgence of the sexual instinct, and *premature marriage*. If the offspring are to be healthy, strong, and vigorous, no man ought to marry before the age of twenty-five, or woman before the age of twenty-two or twenty-three. The secretion of the seminal fluid, like all other secretions, must be subject to laws which decide its health and vigour. It should not take place too early or be too frequent, and it should be spontaneous—i. e. the natural result of a healthy organism, not of a mere mental action, or effort of imagination; there is a period of life during which these conditions are complied with, but before and after which they are not. The ancient Germans held it disgraceful to indulge the passion before the age of twenty. The laws of Moses contained particular restrictions on the subject: and it is almost needless to state that the law of Christ inculcates purity of mind as the grand safeguard against the abuse of this faculty. If premature marriages have been preceded by indulgence, they are still more unfavourable to the offspring; and if by syphilis, still more so. The gradual extinction of the higher and aristocratic classes, by the want of direct heirs, is perhaps partly owing to these causes, engendering a scrofulous, and therefore perishable constitution. On the other hand, the lower classes marry early, not only from instinct, but also to obtain the services of a wife and companion; the physical strength has been deteriorated by low diet and hard labour, and the premature marriage completes the inability to produce a healthy, strong, and robust offspring. The labour of the peasantry is said to be two-thirds too much, and their food two-thirds too little; their food, clothing, and habitations are calculated to a minimum of sufficiency.

4. Another originating cause of scrofula is marriage too late in life. Debility in early life may, in some degree, be corrected; that of old age cannot. The generative power begins to decline about the age of forty-five. Those who marry late in life may have one or two children strong, but every child is weaker than the preceding one, and the youngest are the weakest. The child of the old man is become a proverb for visible debility stamped upon its physiognomy. Many of them die at birth. Some are precocious in childhood, and then suddenly fade and become effete and stunted, like the withering and dropping of fresh fruit in autumn: they are born out of due season. The period of weak fecundity in women commences about the age of forty. After this time pregnancy is often a delusion, or there is an imperfect conception or miscarriage, or the child perishes at birth, or, if reared, it is delicate and scrofulous. When marriage has not been followed by children till after several years, they are generally weak and scrofulous, agreeing with the age of the parents at the time of birth. Children born after the expectation of farther increase of family has ceased, are generally scrofulous.

5. Another cause originating scrofula is disproportionate age and unequal vigour. When the father is younger than the mother, it may be a cause of scrofula. In all animals, power is the privilege of the male. The relative superiority of the man ought to be the foundation of marriage. Upon it depend all domestic felicity, and often its morality. The constitution of the children follows that of the father more than that of the mother. This is the law in the brute creation. The breeders of cattle set more value upon the male than the female.

6. Another originating cause of scrofula is paralysis, and also epilepsy, lunacy, and other diseases of the brain.

It may be observed that parents may be scrofulous without apparent signs; the scrofula may be latent, and the children scrofulous. Parents may show no signs of scrofula till after they have had children, when it may begin to appear. In this way it may be said to skip a generation, when it is latent. During the wars of the French Revolution, when the conscription was at its height, France was so depopulated that every man capable of bearing arms was enlisted, and

even many who were incapable. None were left at home but the sick, the infirm, and those who had married at nineteen or earlier, in order to avoid the conscription. Hence the population was kept up by persons too infirm and sickly for military service, and too young to produce strong children. Thus, at the Restoration in 1814, it was found difficult; out of a levy of 80,000 men, to find 25,000 to form a *corps d'élite*, and it was necessary for this purpose to lower the standard of height. After the peace of 1814, when the conscription was less rigorous, the men were more robust. But the conscripts of 1836 were an exception, for they were born in 1816, in which year nine-tenths of the population suffered severely from famine. These facts are obtained from the reports of the French Secretary at War. The end of marriage is domestic happiness, and the procreation of healthy children; and the former depends much upon the latter. The law is very particular about the forms of marriage, but very indifferent about the results. Rational marriages must rest with the parties themselves. Ignorance of the laws of constitutional health is one great cause of irrational marriages. The great motives to marriage are rank, property, fancy; to these ought to be added, morals, intellect, health, which are more important for happiness. The moralist has hitherto been too little of a physiologist. Physiology is the basis of morals as well as of health. The educator ought to be a physiologist as well as a moralist. It is only by the union of the two that the young can be judiciously trained, and prepared for real life. However persons may despise physiological warnings before marriage, they are too sensible of their value afterwards. Constitutional diseases not only produce unhealthy children, but often also disgust, aversion, and misery between the parties themselves. Marriage will not strengthen a weak constitution, as some suppose, but debilitate it still more. It is a common observation of females, "I have never been well since I married." Child-bearing and nursing demand more than a delicate and tainted constitution can bear. The strength gives way under the heat and burden of the day.

I have thus endeavoured, though too briefly for the importance of the subject, to trace the history of the scrofulous constitution in its hereditary principles, direct and indirect, proximate and remote. Where it exists, it cannot be entirely eradicated. Where it does not exist, it may be originated by the vices and follies of men. I have considered it as the source of many diseases not hitherto attributed to it; and that its best antidote would be a judicious education and training upon physiological principles. These principles it is the aim and merit of medicine to diffuse among society. The medical voice reaches the highest and lowest ranks. Her useful and practical truths are of daily application, and daily disseminated by her faithful disciples, who, in the lower walks of the profession, ever ready by day or night at the call of distress, find their chief and often their only reward in the conscious exercise of the duties of humanity, the *mens sibi conscia recti*. Finally, the greatest compliment which has yet been paid to the medical profession, and its humane and scientific principles, is to see the whole legislature, and every populous city in the kingdom, resolve to adopt them as a basis of civil polity, and to carry them out for the health, benefit, and happiness of the poorest and largest class of our fellow-creatures.—*Provincial Med. and Surg. Journal*, Oct. 3, 1849.

17. *Progressive General Palsy*.—In the *Annales Médico-Psychologiques*, M. LUNIER has published a paper on progressive general palsy, which he seeks to show may affect the sound in mind, as well as the insane. He says its nature was misunderstood until towards the close of the last century; it was described by Haslam, Esquirol, and Georget, as a complication, or rather a termination, of insanity. Progressive general palsy was, for a long while, and is even now, regarded by many practitioners as a disease proper to the insane. Nevertheless, one of the earliest works published on this subject—the thesis of M. Delaye, which appeared in 1824—contains a case of progressive general palsy, which occurred in an individual whose intellect was perfectly sound. The author of this excellent dissertation, however, considers the case in question to be exceptional, and the greater number of practitioners who have since written on the subject speak of it as the only case that has come to their knowledge. The